The Efffects Of Louis 16Th On France Essay, Research Paper

The French Revolution was a significant milestone in European history,

remembered by many in historical and literary works. The situation in France, mostly

under the leadership of Louis XVI, had a negative influence in France, thus creating a

perfect climate for the French Revolution. France was plagued by both debt, and poor

decision making. prior to 1789.

France was poverty-stricken and burdened with some of the highest debts. On the

and Interior Minister Chretien Guillaume de Lamoignon de Malesherbes (\*The economic

origins of the French revolution, pg. 4). Louis introduced some of the most oppressive

taxes and instituted financial reforms. Greater reforms were prevented by the opposition

of the upper classes and court. This opposition was so strong that Turgot was forced to

resign and was replaced by Jauques Necker. Lengthy wars, the support to the American

Revolution and the gross amount of taxes paid and the lavish spending of the court

contributed to the huge national debt. The government?s financial problems were made

worse after 1740 by the renewal of costly wars (the French revolution, pg. 9). The war of

the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) and the Seven Year?s War (1756-1763) were

European wars over the domination of central Europe and colonial and commercial wars

between France and Great Britain (\*Aspects of the French Revolution pg. ). At their

end, in 1763 France had lost almost all of it?s colonial empire in America and India. In

1778 the French launched an attack against Britain in the American Revolution. They

were hoping to weaken old rivalries and regain lost colonies. The hopes of the French

were not realized and their participation in the war increased an already heavy national

debt. After Louis XVI granted financial aid (1778-81) to the American colonies

revolting against Great Britain, Necker proposed drastic taxes on the nobility. Necker

was forced to resign in 1781 (Louis XVI and M. Antoinette ..pg 37) because of the

discontentment of the people. Charles Alexandre deCalonne replaced him in 1783 and

borrowed money for the court until the borrowing limit was reached (\* Canadian

Encyclopedia ref: france, revolution ). The anger of the French people against taxes,

debt and lavish spending on the Court resulted in the recall of Necker in 1788, who still

could not prevent bankruptcy of the government. During the next couple of years the

financial crisis steadily worsened, because the government was bankrupt. Louis was

forced to call a meeting with a delegate of the Estates-General, ( a government group

consisting of representatives of the clergy, nobility and commoners). Once in the

meeting the Estates-General took power of the government. One of the other causes of

the national debt was at the fault of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Louis XVI was

described as not overly intelligent, weak and incapable king (\* Encarta, ref: Louis XVI).

But he was intelligent enough to get money from the government. It was well known

that Louis was more concerned with his own personal affairs than with the interests of

the court and the people. Often work bored him and he left his work up to his advisors

an ministers. He preferred to spend a lot time and the people?s money on extravagant

things, and his wife. Rather than paying back previous debts and helping the situation,

he increased taxes on the peasants and spent more money, worsening the predicament.

By 1787, the national debt was 112,000,000 livres (\* the French Revolution, Albert…

pg. 25) and continued to get worse, sharpening the national debt even more.

In the time leading up into and during the French Revolution there was class

tensions, often between the nobility and the peasants. There were also poor living

conditions. Some say that these situations are not Louis XVI?s fault but were problems

he inherited with the throne. So he cannot be blamed for the events leading into the

French Revolution. In this time period there were class tensions. The nobles had all the

privileges and rights. The peasants were stepped on from every angle. So what made

the nobles so desirable? There was glamour, distinction and recognition that the noble

statues brought. They had a range of privileges that they received. Nobles took

precedence on public occasions, and carried swords. (the French Revolution, sydenham,

..pg 61)They were entitled to a trial at a special courts. They also enjoyed financial

advantages. They paid no duties on transferring feudal property and nobility conferred

exemption from the basic tax, le taille (\* Oxford, pg. 27) The wealthy consisted of the

nobles, clergy and the bourgeoisie and there was approximately 120,000 wealthy. The

peasants and commoners (middle and lower class) however were on the bottom and

consisted of eighty percent of the population. They struggled to survive and were heavily

taxed. The workers of France ate inferior bread to their betters, and wore clothing made

of cheaper material. They spent half of their earnings on bread and were plagued with

unemployment. In Paris the gap between the very rich ( minority) and the majority of

peasants was large. The crisis of the western world was felt mostly in France.

Population increase was accompanied by the fragmentation of peasant holdings,

inadequate increase in agriculture productivity and bad harvests after 1770. Both wages

of the commoner and the level of employment lagged behind the rising price of grain and

other basic necessities. Substantial sections of France were faced with declining

standard of living. The result of this was death, emigration, and increased number of

beggar, pauper and homeless citizens (\* Revolution and Terror in France..pg20). The

peasants were working hard or not at all, and the money they made was spent on bread

and taxes. Many people were left homeless because they couldn?t pay the taxes. Even

though the ?whole? situation was not Louis XVI?s personal fault, the choices and

decisions he formed, made the situation even worse.

During Louis XVI?s reign, he made some very poor decisions that could have

influenced the end result of the French revolution. Firstly, He was influenced greatly by

people around him (\* Canadian Encyclopedia, Ref: Louis XVI). He was described as not

overly intelligent, inexperienced and not completely dedicated to his duties.

Through-out his reign (1774-1792) the king was helped/supported and even betrayed by

Necker. Necker made a lot of the king?s decisions and persuaded him. He seemed to be

on Louis XVI?s side but then Necker published an account of the royal finances, which

revealed the heavy costs of the privileges and favoritism. This action, not only went

against the monarchy, but earned Necker popular acclaim. Necker also helped Louis

decide that the commoners (third estate) would have as many voters as the First and

Second Estate (clergy and nobility) combined. But both he and Louis failed to make a

ruling on the method of voting (the head count was not granted). In 1770 Louis married

Marie Antoinette, youngest daughter of Archduchess Maria Theresa of Austria. She

influenced Louis to attend to the interests of Austria, and to ignore the financial crisis in

France. She often stood in the way of Louis?s proposed reforms by talking him out of

them ( Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette pg 488 ). She talked him into firing Turgot,

who may have been able to prevent the revolution. Her lavish life style and the fact that

she was a foreigner made her unpopular with the public. She also influenced Louis to

spend incredible amounts of money on her. Secondly, due to the financial problems and

the conflict between classes, the year 1788 proved to be difficult for all. All classes were

discontent with the Ancien Regime and wanted a change. Louis XVI never took

advantage of this situation to introduce new reforms and gain the support of the people.

Thirdly, under pressure from nobility and other influential powers, Louis agreed to meet

with the Estates-General. Instead this encouraged further criticism of the Ancien Regime

and provided a stronger force against the monarchy in France. All in all, Louis was

incapable of a strong decision. He should have been capable of overcoming his

problems. Louis?s powerful position should have allowed him to force taxes on the

nobility. He should have never met with the Estates-General. Instead he should have

introduced mild reforms to gain the support of the public. Perhaps if Louis XVI had been

a stronger person the nobility, the clergy and his wife wouldn?t have influenced him to

the same degree.

As we have noticed, there were many factors/causes that lead to the revolution.

Many aspects were piled up and the only was down was the revolution. Many of the

answers to our questions are left unknown. If Louis XVI had not been King, would there

have been a revolution, or was it inevitable?

Bibliography

internet documents, libreary books, source documents etc